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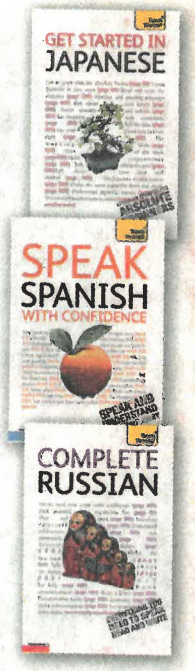

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Languages for the 21st century

Mandarin Chinese

学普

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Never thought you would learn Chinese? Think again. Mandarin Chinese has more native speakers than any other language in the world and China has the fastest-growing economy on the planet; Mandarin is also becoming increasingly popular at UK schools. This booklet will teach you your first words and phrases. You can listen to audio versions of all the conversations at **guardian.co.uk/21stclanguages**

The series continues all week
Tomorrow **Hindi**
Wednesday **Russian**
Thursday **Brazilian Portuguese**
Friday **Latin American Spanish**

Chinese whispers

The culture and economy of the People's Republic are on the rise. If you want to master its language, you need a good ear and a willingness to mimic

Paddy Ashdown is a diplomat, a former leader of the Liberal party, and a certified Mandarin interpreter

The lingua franca of modern China is not actually called Mandarin (which comes from the bad old days before Communism and refers to the language spoken by the mandarins or court servants). The politically correct word nowadays is *Pǔtōnghuà* - meaning the common or ordinary language.

But whatever you call it, this is now arguably, after English of course, the world's most important language. And not because it is the common language spoken by the world's biggest country in terms of population (1.3 billion now and rising fast - or nearly one quarter of the world's population). Though that's one reason, for it means that, if you can speak Chinese and English, then you can speak to around half of the humanity of our planet.

But now, China is more than big - it is also rising. There may be different views about whether this will happen quickly or slowly. I personally think that before China can achieve her full potential, she will have to democratise her society, just as she has liberalised her economy

Street food in Shanghai

HARRY GRUYAERT/MAGNUM

and this may be more difficult than many understand. Either way, there are very few now who would not accept that she will be one of the major global powers of our age with interests in every part of the world.

So this is a great language, with great potential. But, grammatically at least, it is not a difficult language. The difficulties a foreigner experiences with Chinese are more human rather than intellectual.

And the first comes from the language's beauty. There is a wonderful mellifluous musical underpinning to Chinese, which exists in no other language - indeed the language only works if you understand its music. This

If you can speak Chinese and English, then you can speak to around half of the humanity of our planet

is because this is a monosyllabic language with the differentiation between one word and another being entirely dependent on the tone in which it is said (there are four tones in *Pǔtōnghuà*, seven in Cantonese). And some of the tones even change according to their juxtaposition with others. The effect, multiplied by a great richness of regional accent (in Beijing they roll their "r" and slide their elisions in a way that would make any Devonian proud) adds up to a language which is immensely pleasing to the ear. Often when I hear Chinese visitors speaking *Pǔtōnghuà* on the streets of London, I will hang around them for a bit, just for the pleasure of hearing them talk.

Learning to apply these tones accurately can be tricky for a foreigner at first and sometimes leads to hilarious mistakes (I once accidentally asked a very proper Chinese lady at a dinner party if she had ever sat on a flying penis, instead of what I meant to ask her, if she had ever flown on an aircraft).

To learn spoken *Pǔtōnghuà*, you need a good ear (though not necessarily a musical one - I am hopelessly unmusical) and an ability to mimic. To learn the written language, what you

In Beijing they roll their 'r' and slide their elisions in a way that would make any Devonian proud

chiefly need is a good memory. Here the problem is that written Chinese is not spelt, it is drawn. Western written languages (and indeed most world ones) depend on words being spelt in letters from an alphabet. But in Chinese there is no alphabet. Each word is represented by a different picture. This means that to read or write for a newspaper like, say the Sun, you would need to know perhaps 6,000 characters - for the Guardian you would need 10,000. And an educated Chinese would know upwards of 40,000.

Learning these can be quite a sweat, though by no means insurmountable. Speaking and reading Mandarin or *Pǔtōnghuà* will give you contact with one of the world's greatest civilisations, richest histories and most important nations in the emerging world.

How Mandarin Chinese works

In one form or another, Chinese is the language most spoken in the world. It has many different spoken forms, but they are all written in almost exactly the same way, the difference being that a simplified script is used in mainland China and in Singapore and that full-form characters are used in Taiwan and Hong Kong. More than 70% of Chinese people speak the northern dialect of Chinese, so the national language, Mandarin Chinese, is based on this. More Chinese speakers can understand this national language than any other form of Chinese - in China it is called *Pǔtōnghuà* ('common speech'), but it is sometimes referred to in the West as Modern Standard Chinese.

Contrary to what most people believe, Chinese is not a difficult language. Pronunciation and grammar are generally straightforward even if they require you to do a few things you're not used to. It's also an extremely logical language. Even the four tones (plus a neutral tone) of *Pǔtōnghuà* are not intrinsically difficult, though they do involve a lot of time and practice.

Nobody can say, however, that learning to read and write Chinese characters is easy - fascinating yes, but not easy. Chinese cannot be written using a phonetic alphabet in the way that European languages can: it is written in characters. Various ways have been devised for representing Chinese sounds alphabetically. The standard form in use today is known as *pīnyīn* (meaning quite literally 'spell sound') and is what we have used in this booklet so that you can get straight down to speaking Chinese without the barrier of an unknown form of writing. In 1958 *pīnyīn* was adopted as the official system of romanisation (the process of converting a script into the roman alphabet) in the People's republic of China. You'll need to remember, however, that *pīnyīn* is not an accurate phonetic transliteration of Chinese sounds for English speakers. Turn to the next page for a handy pronunciation guide, and on page 20 there's a selection of frequently used characters for you to learn.

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VOWEL SOUNDS

a like the 'a' in 'father', eg *baba*
ai like the 'i' in 'bite', eg *tai*
ao like the 'ow' in 'cow', eg *zhao*
e like the 'u' in 'fur', eg *che*
ei like the 'ay' in 'play', eg *bei*
i like the 'ea' in 'tea', eg *didi*

If the **i** comes after **z**, **c**, **s**, **zh**, **ch**, **sh** and **r**, it is there more or less for cosmetic reasons – no syllable can exist without a vowel. Say the consonant and "sit on it" and you have the sound.

ia like the 'ya' in 'yarrow', eg *jia*
iao like the 'eow' in 'meow', eg *biao*
ie like the 'ye' in 'yes', eg *bie*
iu like the 'yo' in 'yo-yo', eg *liu*
o like the 'ore' in 'more', eg *moyimo*
ou like the 'o' in 'go', eg *dou*
u like the 'oo' in 'moo', eg *bu*
ua like the 'ua' in 'suave', eg *gua*
uo like the 'wa' in 'war', eg *shuo*
uai like the 'wi' in 'swipe', eg *kuai*
ui like 'weigh', eg *dui*
ü like the 'eu' in 'pneumonia', eg *ju*
üe like the 'eu' and the 'air' in 'pneumatic air' (said quickly), eg *yue*

Here are the vowels with a nasal sound formed with vowels followed by **n** or **ng**. Speak through your nose when you pronounce them.

an like the 'an' in 'man', eg *fan*
ang like the 'ang' in 'bang', eg *zhang*
en like the 'un' in 'under', eg *ren*
eng like the 'hung', eg *deng*
in like the 'in' in 'bin', eg *nin*
ian like 'yen', eg *tian*
iang like the 'Yang' in 'Yangtse River', eg *liang*
ing like the 'ing' in finger, eg *ming*
iong like 'Jung' (the psychoanalyst), eg *qiong*
ong like the 'ung' in 'Jung', eg *tong*
uan like the 'wan' in 'wangle', eg *wan*
un like 'won', eg *lun*
uang like 'wrong' without pronouncing the 'r', eg *huang*
üan like the 'eu' and the 'en' in 'pneumatic end' (said quickly), eg *yuan*
ün like 'une' in French, eg *yun*

CONSONANT SOUNDS

Some Chinese consonants are quite similar to English sounds, others less so. Those that are very different are explained below.

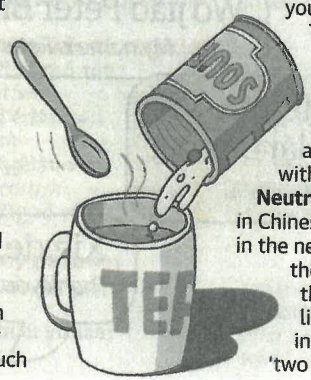
z like the 'ds' in 'adds', eg *zi*
c like the 'ts' in 'its', eg *ci*
zh like the 'j' in 'jelly', eg *zhao*
q like the 'ch' in 'cheese', eg *qi*
x like the like the 'sh' in 'sheet', eg *xiao*
h like the 'ch' in 'loch', eg *huan*

TONES

Chinese is a tonal language. Every syllable in Chinese has its own tone. *Pǔtōnghuà* has four distinct tones plus a neutral tone. This means that syllables which are pronounced the same but have different tones will mean different things. For example, *tang* pronounced in the first tone means 'soup' but pronounced in the second tone means 'sugar'. But don't worry – all the four tones fall within your natural voice range.

You don't have to have a particular type of voice to speak Chinese. The four tones are represented by the following marks which are put over the vowel such as *nǐ* ('you') or over the main vowel of a syllable where there are two or three vowels, for example, *hǎo* ('good'), but *guó* ('country'):

¯ 1st tone, high and level
´ 2nd tone, rising
ˇ 3rd tone, falling – rising
` 4th tone, falling



1st tone: Pitch it where you feel comfortable. Say 'oo' as in 'zoo' and keep going for as long as you can. You should be able to keep it up for maybe half a minute. When you have got used to that, change to another vowel sound and practise that in the same way and so on.

2nd tone: Raise your eyebrows every time you attempt a second tone until you get used to it. This is infallible!

3rd tone: Drop your chin onto your neck and raise it again. Then practise the sound doing the movement at the same time.

4th tone: Stamp your foot gently and then accompany this action with the relevant sound.

Neutral tones: Some syllables in Chinese are toneless or occur in the neutral tone. This means they have no tone mark over the vowel. They are rather like unstressed syllables in English, such as 'of a' in 'two of a kind'.

Nín hǎo!
Hello.

Nǐ hǎo!
Hello.

Nín shì Bùlǎng xiānsheng ma?
Are you Mr Brown?

Shì.
Yes.

Wǒ jiào Wáng Lìlì.
My name is Wang Lili.

Wǒ jiào Peter Brown.
My name is Peter Brown.

Bùlǎng xiānsheng, huānyíng nín lái Běijīng.
Mr Brown, welcome to Beijing.

Xièxie.
Thank you.

Greetings and goodbyes

nǐ hǎo! *hello! (singular)*
nǐmen hǎo! *hello! (plural)*
nín hǎo! *hello! (polite)*
qǐng wèn, ...? *may I ask ...?*
qǐng jìn! *please come in*
qǐng zuò! *please sit down*
... hǎo ma? *how is/are ...?*
nǐ *you (sing)*
nǐmen *you (pl)*
hǎo *good, well*
wǒ hǎo *I am well/good*
wǒ bu hǎo *I am not well/good*
nǐ ne? *and you?*
duìbuqǐ *excuse me/I'm sorry*
bú yòng xiè *not at all (lit. no need thank)*
méi guānxi *it's OK/it doesn't matter*
xièxie *thank you, to thank*
zàijiàn *goodbye*
míngtiān *tomorrow*
míngtiān jiàn *see you tomorrow*

Countries and nationalities

Yīngguó/Yīngguó-rén
Britain/British
Ái'ěrlán/Ái'ěrlán-rén
Ireland/Irish
Sūgélán/Sūgélán-rén
Scotland/Scottish
Měiguó/Měiguó-rén
USA/American
Zhōngguó/Zhōngguó-rén
China/Chinese
Yuènán/Yuènán-rén
Vietnam/Vietnamese
Rìběn/Rìběn-rén
Japan/Japanese

Emergency phrases

qǐng zài shuō yí cì *please say it again*
qǐng shuō màn yìdiǎnr *slowly, please*
duì bu duì? *is that right?*
shì shénme yìsi? *what does it mean?*
wǒ bù dǒng *I don't understand*

Introducing ...

míngzi *name*
nǐ/tā jiào shénme (míngzi)? *what is your/his/her name?*
tā/tā *she/he*
wǒ *I, me*
wǒ jiào ... *I am called*
tā jiào... *he/she is called ...*
nǐ jiào ... *you are called ...*
wǒ/nǐ/ta (bú) shì ... *I am/you are/ he is/she is (not) ...*
zhè/nà (bú) shì ... *this/that is (not) ...*
tā shì shéi? *who is he/she?*
tā shì bu shì ...? *is he/she ...?*
shéi/shuí? *who?*
shénme? *what?*
wǒde/nǐde/nínde/tāde *my, your, your (polite form) his/her*
tàitai *Mrs, wife*
xiānsheng *Mr, husband, gentleman*
xiǎojie *Miss*

In the street

Ordering

gēn wǒ lái *follow me*
fúwùyuán *staff*
càidān *menu (lit. dish list)*
nǐmen chī/hē diǎnr shénme? *what would you like to eat/drink?*
wǒ hē ... *I'll have ...*
chī *to eat*
hē *to drink*
wǒ è le *I'm hungry*
fàn *food, meal*
cài *dish*
wǎn(r) *bowl*
bēi *a cup of; cup*
kuàizi *chopsticks*
duō *more; many*
hǎochī *delicious, tasty (food)*
hǎohē *delicious (drink)*
pàng *fat*
rè *hot*
là (de) *hot, spicy (food)*
chī sù *to be vegetarian (lit. eat non-meat food)*

Types of food

tāng *soup*
suānlà tāng *hot and sour soup*
dòufu *beancurd*
mápó dòufu *spicy beancurd/tofu*
miànbāo *bread*
mǐfàn *(cooked) rice*
chǎofàn *stir-fried rice*
qīngcài *vegetables*
sùcài *vegetarian dishes*
báicài *Chinese leaves*
miàntiáo *noodles*
chǎomiàn *fried noodles*
jiǎozi *(boiled) dumplings*
ròu *meat*
niúròu *beef*
jīròu *chicken*
(běijīng) kǎoyā *(Peking) duck*
yú *fish*
bīngqílín *ice-cream*
dàngāo *cake*

Drinks

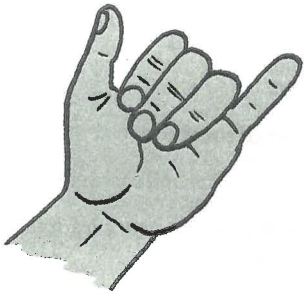
chá *tea*
hóng chá *black tea*
lǜ chá *green tea*
júzizhī *orange juice*
kěkǒukělè *Coca-Cola*
píjiǔ *beer*
pútaojiǔ *wine (lit. grape alcohol)*
kāfēi *coffee*

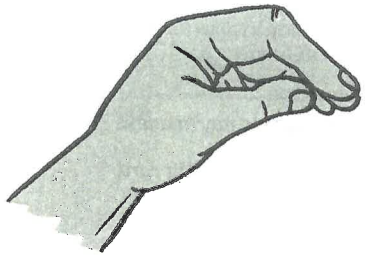
Paying up

chī-wán/chī-bǎo/chī-hǎo le *to have finished eating/be full/ satisfied*
jié zhàng *to ask for the bill (lit. conclude the bill)*
qǐng jié zhàng *the bill, please*
fù qián *to pay (money)*
xiànjīn *cash*
xìnyòng kǎ *credit card*
zhīpiào *cheque*
zhǐ *only*
yígòng *altogether*

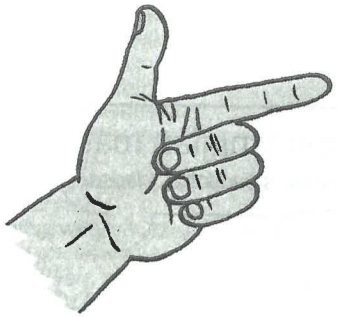
Unlike in most other countries, people in China will use only one hand to signify numbers one to 10. This is very useful for bargaining, not least because in China the words for basic numbers vary between regions. Numbers one to five are indicated as normal, the rest as follows:

"liù"
"Six"
How to do it: extend thumb and little finger, keeping rest of the hand closed. The thumb indicates one set of five.



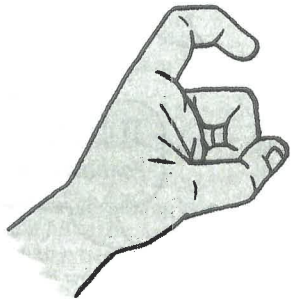


"qī"
"Seven"
How to do it: fingertips of thumb and first two fingers are touching as hand is pointing outwards.



"bā"
"Eight"
How to do it: extend thumb and index finger to make an L shape, with palm facing the observer.

"jiǔ"
"Nine"
How to do it: whole hand is closed apart from index finger, which forms a hook shape.



"shí"
"Ten"
How to do it: fist is closed with palm facing person making the sign. Note: in some regions this sign may be interpreted as "zero".

Nín hǎo.
Hello.

Qǐng wèn, yǒu fángjiān ma?
Do you have any rooms available, please?

Yǒu. Jǐ wèi?
Yes, we do. (For) how many?

Liǎng wèi.
Two people.

Jǐ tiān?
For how many days?

Liǎng tiān.
Two days.

Dānrén fángjiān, shuāngrén fángjiān?
Single rooms (or) double rooms?

Liǎng ge dānrén fángjiān.
Two single rooms.

Booking a room

bīnguǎn/fàndiàn/lǚguǎn *hotel*
fúwù *service*
jīnglǐ *manager*
fúwùyuán *attendant*
fúwùtái *reception (lit. service platform)*
yùding le ma? *have you reserved?*
wǐng wèn, yǒu fángjiān ma? *do you have any rooms available, please?*
jǐ wèi? *(for) how many?*
yí wèi *one person*
liǎng wèi *two people*
jǐ tiān? *for how many days?*
yí ge wǎnshang *one night*
liǎng tiān *two days*
yí ge xīngqī *one week*
dānrén fángjiān *single room*
shuāngrén fángjiān *double room*
bāo zǎocān ma? *is breakfast included?*
zǎocān/zǎofàn *breakfast*
wǎnfàn *dinner, supper*
cāntīng zài nǎr? *where is the restaurant?*
cāntīng *restaurant, canteen*
jiǔbā *bar*
yǒu diànhuà ma? *is there a telephone?*
diànhuà *telephone*
diànshì *television*
xǐzǎojiān *bathroom*
cèsuǒ *toilet*
línyù *shower*
shuǐ *water*

Paying for a room

duōshao qián? *how much is it?*
yí ge fángjiān *per room*
bā bǎi kuài yì tiān *800 kuai a day*
měiyuán *US dollar*
shōu xìnyòng kǎ ma? *do you take credit cards?*
shōu *yes*
duìbuqǐ, bù shōu *sorry, no (credit cards)*
zhǐ shōu xiànjīn *cash only*
tián *to fill in (a form)*
qǐng tián zhè zhāng biǎo *please fill in this form*
hùzhào *passport*
qǐng gěi wǒ nǐn-de hùzhào *please give me your passport*
qǐng dào zhèibiān *please come this way*
yàoshi *key*
zhè shì nín-de yàoshi *here is your key*
xíngli *luggage*

Making a complaint

wǒ yǒu (ge) wèntí *I have a problem*
yǒu wèntí *to have problems*
chǎo *noisy*
tài chǎo le *it's noisy*
huài le *broken (lit. gone bad)*
tài xiǎo le *too small*
zāng *dirty*

Chinese is not written in a phonetic alphabet in the way that European languages are. While some Chinese characters have a phonetic function and give you a clue as to their pronunciation, others are pictograms: they visibly resemble the objects they have evolved from. Others are combinations of the two.

There are around 200 so-called "radicals" in Chinese writing: common components of a character which give you a partial idea of its meaning. For example, when Chinese people see a character with the 'heart' radical, they can assume that the character has something to do with the emotions. Below is a list of some common radicals:

人	rén	person
广	guǎng	covering, roof
门	mén	door
工	gōng	work
大	dà	big
口	kǒu	mouth
山	shān	mountain
女	nǚ	woman
子	zǐ	child
小	xiǎo	small

心	xīn	heart
王	wáng	king
天	tiān	sky, heaven, day
车	chē	vehicle
父	fù	father
风	fēng	wind
水	shuǐ	water
目	mù	eye
禾	hé	grain, plant
米	mǐ	uncooked rice
言	yán	speech
走	zǒu	to go, walk
雨	yǔ	rain
田	tián	field

Common signs

"Yíngyè zhōng"
"Open"

"Gōnggòng cèsuǒ"
"Public toilet"

"Fàndiàn"
"Hotel"

"Yǐ xiàbān"
"Closed"

"Yīyuàn"
"Hospital"